

140 years of the Hungarian Customs and Finance Guard

T*The Customs and Finance Guard marks the 140th anniversary of its establishment in 2007. Though the legal institution of customs and excise, these two important branches of the profession of fiscal administration, looks back on a history of one thousand years – all the way back to St. Stephen's laws, also to a number of documents of historical significance, to King Andrew II's Golden Bull of 1222, for example – 1867 is the most significant year for the organisation, when Minister of Finance Count Menyhért Lónyay, in his Circular Decree No. 1 . of 10th March, provided for the establishment of the independent Hungarian Royal Finance Guard.*

Throughout its 140-year-long history, the organisation went through significant development in terms of organisational structure and evolution of the profession, with continuously widening scopes of authority, with extensive investigative powers that are of unprecedented breadth not only among the national public administration organisations, but also among the customs administrations of the EU Member States.

On 10 March 2007, the top-level leaders of the Hungarian Customs and Finance Guard, in the presence of high ranking guests of honour – President of the Supreme Court Zoltán Lomnici, Minister of Finance János Veres, chiefs of partner agencies, heads of civilian professional partner

organisations – remembered the history, the development and achievements of the organisation in the one-time building of the Ministry of Finance on Trinity Square in the Buda Castle District. Following a wreath-laying ceremony at the memorial plaque on the facade of the building, a ceremonial commanders' conference took place. Major General János Nagy delivered his welcome address, followed by Minister of Finance János Veres, who also tied a memorial ribbon to the flagstaff of the HC&FC flag, and placed a day-of-issue stamp on the memorial postal stamp issued by the Hungarian Postal Service to commemorate the anniversary.

COMMEMORATIVE SPEECH BY MAJOR GENERAL JÁNOS NAGY

Greetings to you all, on this most important day in the history of the corps, which we dedicate to our traditions and remembrance, to celebrate the 140th anniversary of the establishment of the independent Hungarian Royal Finance Guard, predecessor of today's Hungarian Customs and Finance Guard.

Under this token, I wish to look further back in history, all the way to the days of St. Matthew, also called Levi, Apostle and Evangelist.

Over two thousand years ago, Matthew, son of *Alphaeus*, was a publican (toll-collector) in Caphernaum, where *Jesus* called him to join his disciples, and so he became the recorder of His discourses and sermons, thus laying the foundation of the complete Gospel. In the Gospel, records related to money are marks of Matthew's hand. The Scriptures in the New Testament indicate 80 locations of financial transactions, 37 data were given in 10 different currencies, and the terms “custom” and “customs duties” can be read as many times.

Matthew's authorship is beyond doubt, and, as he did then, also through centuries to follow, he has kept a protective eye on toll-collectors, which no doubt helped make this historical profession survive beyond ages and assume ever-greater significance among the activities aimed at securing state revenue.

This is why all customs administrations of the European Union selected him to be their patron saint, and thus he could form a spiritual link between all European customs officers and finance employees.

Today we remember 10th March 1867.

With the disestablishment of the district commands of the Imperial-Royal Finance Guard, the Hungarian Royal Finance Guard was founded, its supervisory authority being the Hungarian Royal Ministry of Finance, headed by Minister of Finance *Count Menyhért Lónyay*.

140 years ago, Menyhért Lónyay issued the following order:

“... as of today, all authorities and offices [...] under the Hungarian Royal Ministry of Finance, shall receive instructions in any and all matters related to the fiscal profession in the territory of Hungary and Transylvania, solely from me or from the Hungarian Royal Ministry of Finance, respectively, and shall submit their reports along the same chain of command.”

Following Circular Decree No. 1, the Hungarian Royal Finance Guard assumed a

national character, achieved independence in the then closely intertwined Austro–Hungarian public administration system. This manifested itself not only in the external appearance of the organisation and in the omission of the word “Imperial” from its name, but the service relationship with Vienna ceased to exist, and Hungarian became the official language, both in the official communication and on the official signs and stamps.

The organisational change meant more than mere independence. Through the scope of authority granted to the Royal Finance Guard, the Hungarian Government took a major step towards the steadiness of securing fiscal means ensuring the execution of state functions, providing a background for economic development. The year 1868 marks the enactment of laws that provide for the regular collection of state revenues; these laws continue to determine our basic missions.

The site of the building of the then Ministry of Finance provides an historic scene. The predecessor of this beautiful building, redolent with age, saw statesmen and historic figures working within its walls. I am now proud to stand here as the head of an organisation that received instructions from this place for so long, where its missions were formulated, where the organisation could submit its reports on its achievements to the supervisory authorities. Moreover, I am proud, too, to stand here today because I can remember the history of an organisation with great traditions.

I can evoke the atmosphere of the decrees of days of old, written in a style that sounds a bit archaic today, but which is beautiful all the same. I can evoke archival photographs showing the mounted patrol on its way to the duty detail, or later photographs – taken in the 1920's – in which the finance officer, as a result of technical upgrading, mounts his bicycle, with his raw leather bag containing the alcoholometry and customs leads equipment slung

over his shoulder. What a long way we have come since, I can say when I think of our mobile customs and finance guard office buses, X-ray equipment for articulated trucks, IT system, electronic procedures, just to name a few of our current assets.

However, we have also come a long way from the recruitment of men only – what is more, from the recruitment for long decades of unmarried men only – to the recognition of hiring female employees. Thus, I can bow my head to the female employees of the Customs and Finance Guard who were first admitted to the corps in 1949, and could only become sworn officers in any service branch of the corps from later on – today they are totally equal with their male fellow officers.

Of course, we must remember the fact that we have also come a long way from performing strictly fiscal administration functions in the beginning to performing other professional functions in the broader sense (here I have in mind the role we play in environmental protection, nature conservation, consumer and health protection), and we are now able to carry out the multi-faceted mission, which is uniquely wide-ranging not only in the Hungarian public administration, but also among the European customs administrations. Perhaps the above also contributed to the fact that we have been

able to make the transition from former introverted, closed corps activities to openness, from the strict and compulsory official conduct to the customer-focussed approach of our everyday activities, free from organisational chauvinism.

These examples are familiar to us, they form our traditions and presence at the same time, which commit us and oblige us at the same time.

They oblige us to persevere on our way to continuous innovation, to attain an ever more efficient accomplishment of our mission, to sustain the unbroken continuation of our organisational and professional achievements. They also commit us to preserving the values of the past, to cherishing and promoting our core values.

This day symbolises a sort of forward-looking continuity for the corps. This is what historical time and the Decree issued by Minister of Finance Menyhért Lónyay mean, and this is what this historical site, the Ministry of Finance of our predecessors, means to me.

With reassurance do I look back on the past 140 years. May I wish all members of the corps a year full of successes in professional achievement and professional events, rich in professional traditions and culture, and may I invoke the protective attention of Matthew, also called Levi, Apostle and Evangelist, to them.